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Statement on East Timor

to the

United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization

8th August 1990

by:
Komite Indonesie
X min Y Beweging
East Timor Working Group
(The Netherlands)

Petitioner: Hasjrul Junaid

Statement on the question of East Timor
to the UN Committee of 24, August 9 , 1990

Mr. Chairman and honourable members,
I represent three Dutch based ngo's, the Indonesia Committee, the East Timor working group and the X - Y Movement. We have been following the tragic history of East Timor since the Indonesian invasion of 1975 and want to use this opportunity to submit this statement to your committee. We want to thank this committee of granting us this opportunity of submitting this statement.

Mr. Chairman,
As Indonesian citizen, my special interest and concern regarding East Timor is a logical one. Sadly I have to state the facts, my country Indonesia, once a powerful anti-colonial force has transformed into a colonizing power. The invasion of East Timor in 1975 by the Indonesian armed forces is indeed a dark chapter in the Indonesian history and I feel it as my duty to speak up against the policies of my government and denounce the act of agression perpetrated by the Indonesian army on a small independent neighbouring country called East Timor. Indonesia in 1955 hosted the First Afro-Asian Conference and this event has gone down in history as a profound expression of anti-colonialism and a shining example for many African colonies to break their final shackles of colonialism. East Timor is one of the few regions left in the world that yet has to be decolonised and this process of decolonisation was brutally interrupted by the invasion in 1975.

Since the invasion, the government in Jakarta has viciously imposed colonial rule in East Timor. Indonesian rule in East Timor carries all the features of colonial rule but on top of that East Timor has always been a special project for ABRI, the Indonesian Armed Forces. The present leadership of the Indonesian army have all served in East Timor and in fact serving in East Timor has become paramount for the further career of an Indonesian army officer. The same army that was borne in the struggle against Dutch colonialism is now suppressing the wish of freedom of the people of East Timor.

East Timor has been declared as Indonesia's 27th province, but in reality it is the ABRI, the Armed Forces, that rule over East Timor. The presence of Indonesian military in the region is overwhelming. Although the official figures state that only 6 battalions are permanently based in East Timor, in reality all the regional military commands in Indonesia are obliged to despatch units in East Timor. Moreover special troops, like the notorious red berets paracommando's, have permanent barracks in East Timor. The coordination of these semi permanent troops is regulated by KOOPSKAM, a special military command directly under the headquarters in Jakarta. Despite earlier statements of the disbandment of KOOPSKAM, this military command is still in existence.

At the beginning of last year, the Indonesian government decided to take a risk by 'opening up' the area. Beforehand East Timor was a closed area, one needed special permits to enter the area and travelling inside East Timor was virtually impossible. Indonesia was forced to open up East Timor, not in the last place because of the many criticisms abroad that Indonesia had something to hide in East Timor. After one and a half year opening up, the balance does not look very good for Indonesia. More visitors and travellers have been allowed in and the majority of the reports reveal the same story: widespread fear among the people of East Timor. The Indonesian military are involved in a wide variety of activities from general security, social and construction work, in the civil service and even in commercial activities. The purpose of the 'opening up' of East Timor was to create the image that the situation in East Timor has become normal. Obviously the strategy of opening up has not become a resounding success for the Indonesian authorities. The leeways created by the opening has skillfully been used by the Timorese youth to show their will of liberty. The visit of the Pope the end of last year and the US ambassador beginning this year have only shown to the outside world the extreme conditions prevailing in East Timor today. Opening East Timor to outsiders has always been a double-edged weapon, while the Indonesian diplomats abroad wellcomed the opening-up, the Indonesian security officers, police and military alike have warned about the grave consequences for Indonesian rule.

The hearts and minds policy

Since the early eighties the Indonesian army command have also developed a hearts and minds strategy, very similar to pacification techniques applied in many parts of the world. Military were assigned to assist the population in road and bridge construction, functioning as school teachers, assisting peasants in farming techniques etc, etc. In the first instance these activities look worthy and innocent, but in East Timor its effects are devastating. The people of East Timor have lost approximately one third of its population in the war against Indonesia, the entire population of East Timor has been uprooted and had to abandon their original villages. These same people, the Indonesian military, are now entering the villages, the neighbourhoods, the local communities introducing the 'superior Indonesian lifestyle'. It is obvious Mr. Chairman, that this kind of hearts and minds policy is bound to fail. This overdose of military presence is felt as a threat by the population and has only deepened the feelings of animosity. The Indonesian initiatives are seen by the Timorese as plans that are dropped in their midst, a typical top to bottom approach. The previous military commander of East Timor, for example, introduced his hobby, developing fish ponds, on large scale in the new Timorese resettlement camps. Fishermen from Muncar, on the south coast of Java were transmigrated to East Timor to teach the locals how to develop advanced fishing techniques. Balinese farmers were sent to East Timor to develop the terraced wet rice fields, a technique alien for many East Timorese. All these examples

have been implemented in East Timor with the same simple message: 'we have to develop the backward Timorese'.

Mr. Chairman,
This kind of attitude must be familiar with anybody who has dealt with colonial attitude, once again I have to state how ashamed I am to be a citizen of a nation, who at present is oppressing the aspirations of a neighbouring country.

Colonialism is a dying phenomena - we all have just celebrated the independence of Namibia - in which this commission has contributed a lot. I hope that the decolonisation process of East Timor will take its rightful course and will give the people of East Timor its place among the nations in this world.

Mr. Chairman and honorable members,
The 17th of July is a day of sorrow for the East Timorese, it is the day where General Suharto, the president of my country,, declared East Timor to be officially integrated into Indonesia. Three weeks ago, on this particular day, pupils in two senior high schools in the capital Dili, in an act of defiance, hoisted the Fretilin flag - the flag of the liberation movement. Military stepped and several youngsters were arrested but this incident of flaghoisting is just one of many and still increasing acts of civil disobedience. The youth of East Timorese, in majority born and raised up under Indonesian rule have shown their defiance towards colonial rule. A team of Indonesian researchers from the Gajah Mada University have noted a shift from military rebellion towards civil disobedience and a negative attitude among school-pupils and young people working in the bureaucracy. The Indonesian colonial rulers now have to face two types of resistance, the armed resistance in the countryside and the growing acts of defiance in the cities. The shift of the resistance to the cities is shown the best by General Benny Murdani, the architect of the invasion in 1975 and at present holding the post of Defence Minister. In his speech on the 3rd of February in Dili this year he gave several strong warnings to the rebellious youth in the city and their parents. It seems the Timorese youth have lost their fear and have become increasingly inventive in their acts of defiance. These last two months, for example, Indonesians in East Timor, military, police, civil servants or businessmen are being aproached by East Timorese youngsters. It happens everywhere, in the marketplace, in the office, in the streets, airport or harbour. Always the same question is being raised : 'When are you going home ?'. This nagging question over and over again gets really on the nerves of the Indonesians. It can be stated that the Indonesian rulers have lost the battle to win the hearts and minds of the youth. Ten years ago the Indonesian rulers concluded to abandon the idea of integrating the old generation of East Timorese to become 'models of Indonesians' and decided to concentrate the efforts on the young generation. The logic was, if the youth was educated in the Indonesian school system, it would automatically transform

them into Indonesians. As history has taught mankind, this kind of logic does not reflect reality. The reality is that the East Timorese live under a colonial system and will develop resistance against this oppressive system.

Mr. Chairman,
For years the Indonesian people have been deceived by its own government. We were misinformed about the situation in East Timor. The war in East Timor was a hidden war for the Indonesian people. Only occasionally one hears about the casualties among the Indonesian soldiers and the fierce resistance of the Timorese. Gradually we see a change in Indonesia. More information is available and the democratic movement in Indonesia is increasingly focussing its concern regarding East Timor. For the first time the East Timor issue has become a matter of concern among student activists. Ammarsyah, one of the Bandung students on trial earlier this year, accused his government of atrocities and mass murder in East Timor. In his defence plea Ammarsyah reiterates: 'This regime has given us a grim history and has sullied the face of our people in the eyes of the international community'.
Democracy cannot be established in Indonesia as long as the East Timor issue has not been resolved. Indonesia can never be free if it still keeps East Timor in its colonial shackles. This conviction is swifly growing among the young, the students and human rights workers in Indonesia and will ultimately contribute to the just solution of the question of East Timor.

Mr. Chairman,
In the Netherlands, the East Timor issue has been a constant matter of concern among human rights organisations, trade unions, church organisations and political parties. The organisations I represent have launched different initiatives regarding East Timor. At present we are collecting signatures in a broad petition to be handed to the Dutch Parliament later this year. Thousands of signatures, so far, have been gathered from the Dutch public, this can be seen as a clear sign of interest and concern on the matter.

Mr. Chairman,
The world today is quite different than one year before. Many rapid changes have occurred. Global peace has become a viable enterprise and the possibility of solving regional conflicts looks very bright indeed. From a bipolar globe we are entering the phase of a multipolar globe. This brings a new shift in the relations among nations . Regional superpowers can emerge as a threat for neighbouring states. The recent example of the Iraqi invasion to Kuwait can be compared with the Indonesian invasion of East Timor 15 years ago. I sincerely hope that the international community will exert its utmost efforts and pressure to defend the rights of the smaller nations. The right of selfdetermination is an unalienable right and should be fully implemented in the case of East Timor.

I thank you for the attention.